

TESTIMONY OF  
DAVID GARRATT  
ACTING DIRECTOR OF RECOVERY  
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY  
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY  
BEFORE THE  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE

HOPE, ARKANSAS

APRIL 27, 2006

GOOD MORNING MADAM CHAIR, SENATOR LIEBERMAN,  
AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE.

MY NAME IS DAVID GARRATT, AND I AM THE ACTING DIRECTOR OF RECOVERY AT FEMA. I'M JOINED BY MS. PATRICIA ENGLISH, FEMA'S CHIEF PROCUREMENT OFFICER, AND MR. RON GOINS, A SENIOR FEMA LOGISTICS OFFICIAL. TODAY WE WILL ADDRESS THE CONCERNS RAISED REGARDING THE MOBILE HOMES THAT FEMA HAS STAGED AT THIS SITE, AS WELL AS DISCUSS THE ROLE THESE MOBILE HOMES WILL PLAY IN SUPPORT OF BOTH ONGOING AND FUTURE DISASTER SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS.

I FULLY APPRECIATE THE COMPELLING VISUAL IMAGE, AND INTUITIVE CONCERNS RAISED, BY THE HOPE MANUFACTURED HOUSING STORAGE SITE. THOUSANDS OF UNUSED MOBILE HOMES SIT VACANT IN ARKANSAS, EVEN AS MANY LOUISIANA AND MISSISSIPPI VICTIMS OF HURRICANE KATRINA CONTINUE TO WAIT FOR TEMPORARY HOUSING. MY GOAL TODAY IS TO EXPLAIN THE DECISIONS BEHIND USE OF THIS SITE, AS WELL AS TO OUTLINE FEMA'S STRATEGY FOR MAKING USE OF EACH MOBILE HOME SITUATED AT HOPE. HOWEVER, TO PLACE THE EXPLANATION IN CONTEXT, I WOULD LIKE TO BRIEFLY OUTLINE FEMA'S HOUSING PROGRAM.

FEMA PROVIDES HOUSING ASSISTANCE TO DISASTER VICTIMS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE AUTHORITIES AND GUIDANCE IN THE ROBERT T. STAFFORD DISASTER

RELIEF AND EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE ACT, AS IMPLEMENTED IN AGENCY REGULATIONS. THE STAFFORD ACT AUTHORIZES THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE TWO TYPES OF HOUSING ASSISTANCE: FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, IN THE FORM OF RENTAL SUBSIDIES, AND DIRECT ASSISTANCE, IN THE FORM OF HOUSING UNITS. BOTH TYPES OF ASSISTANCE ARE, BY LAW, TEMPORARY, AND GENERALLY LIMITED TO 18 MONTHS. THE PRINCIPAL FORM OF ASSISTANCE TO THE VAST MAJORITY OF DISASTER VICTIMS, INCLUDING VICTIMS OF HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA, IS FINANCIAL RENTAL ASSISTANCE. TO DATE, FEMA HAS PROVIDED RENTAL ASSISTANCE TO OVER 715,000 KATRINA AND RITA HOUSEHOLDS. THE SECOND FORM OF ASSISTANCE IS DIRECT HOUSING, WHICH FEMA PROVIDES WHEN THERE IS INSUFFICIENT RENTAL OR HOUSING STOCK IN AN AFFECTED AREA. SUCH WAS, AND REMAINS, THE CASE ALONG THE GULF COAST.

FEMA RECOGNIZED, EVEN BEFORE HURRICANE KATRINA MADE LANDFALL, THAT A PROACTIVE HOUSING STRATEGY WOULD BE REQUIRED IN ITS AFTERMATH. ACCORDINGLY, FEMA ESTABLISHED, PRIOR TO LANDFALL, AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, A HOUSING AREA COMMAND, HEADQUARTERED IN BATON ROUGE. THE INITIAL MISSION OF THE HOUSING AREA COMMAND WAS THREEFOLD: TO BEGIN IDENTIFYING HOUSING NEEDS ; TO IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS INCLUDING ALL AVAILABLE CANDIDATE GROUP SITE LOCATIONS; AND TO BEGIN MOBILIZING AND MOVING TEMPORARY HOUSING UNITS INTO THE AFFECTED AREAS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

FEMA ESTABLISHED THE HOUSING AREA COMMAND BECAUSE WE REALIZED THAT, AFTER LANDFALL, DISASTER RESPONSE EFFORTS WOULD BE SUBSTANTIALLY-- AND RIGHTLY-- FOCUSED ON LIFE-SAVING AND SUSTAINING OPERATIONS – ALWAYS OUR FIRST PRIORITY. NEVERTHELESS, RECOGNIZING THAT THE SCALE OF THE HOUSING MISSION WAS LIKELY TO BE MASSIVE, WE WANTED A DEDICATED HOUSING COMPONENT ACTIVELY PURSUING HOUSING OPTIONS AND SOLUTIONS IN PARALLEL, BUT WITHOUT PULLING ASSETS AND RESOURCES FROM IMMEDIATE RESPONSE EFFORTS.

WE ASKED THE HOUSING AREA COMMAND TO LEAN FAR FORWARD, TO BEGIN AGGRESSIVELY ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF THE VICTIMS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. THE CATASTROPHIC SCALE OF HURRICANE KATRINA HAD A DEVASTATING IMPACT ON HOUSING AND APARTMENT STOCK IN THE GULF COAST AND HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF VICTIMS WERE EVACUATING TO SAFE HAVENS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. THIS GREATLY COMPLICATED THE MISSION OF THE HOUSING AREA COMMAND AS IT BEGAN TO TACKLE THE SHORT AND LONG-TERM HOUSING NEEDS, AND THE MOST APPROPRIATE SOLUTIONS FOR MEETING THESE NEEDS.

RECOGNIZING THAT SO MANY EVACUEES HAD SUFFERED THE LOSS OF THEIR HOMES, THE HOUSING AREA COMMAND ORDERED TENS OF THOUSANDS OF TRAVEL TRAILERS AND MOBILE HOMES. THE HOUSING AREA COMMAND ALSO

SOUGHT TO IDENTIFY OTHER HOUSING OPTIONS, SUCH AS RENTAL UNITS, THAT PROVIDE A MORE SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT. WITHIN WEEKS, FEMA BEGAN THE PROCESS OF RECEIVING AND INSTALLING THOSE UNITS THROUGHOUT THE GULF COAST REGION, BOTH ON PRIVATE PROPERTY SITES, AS WELL AS ON GROUP SITES. AS OF TODAY, THIS STRATEGY HAS PROVIDED 100,000 MANUFACTURED HOUSING UNITS READY FOR OCCUPANCY THROUGHOUT THE AFFECTED AREA, WE BELIEVE THIS TO BE QUITE A LOGISTICAL FEAT, AS IT VASTLY OUTSTRIPS ANY PREVIOUS TEMPORARY HOUSING RESPONSE AND RECOVERY EFFORT IN THE UNITED STATES.

THESE WERE THE STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS THAT GUIDED OUR TACTICAL RESPONSE AS WE MADE OUR INITIAL PURCHASES OF MOBILE HOMES AND TRAVEL TRAILERS. WE PURCHASED HOUSING UNITS AS A TEMPORARY MEASURE TO REPLACE THE TENS OF THOUSANDS OF DAMAGED AND DESTROYED HOMES AND TO RAPIDLY PROVIDE A PLACE FOR VICTIMS TO RETURN HOME.

FEMA AND DHS REALIZED IMMEDIATELY THAT THE ROAD TO RECOVERY WOULD BE DIFFICULT. IN THE ABSENCE OF DETAILED INFORMATION ON COMMUNITIES' SPECIFIC HOUSING NEEDS AND PRIORITIES, WE WERE STILL FACED WITH THE CHALLENGE OF HOW TO JUMP-START HOUSING RECOVERY. ONE OF OUR TEMPORARY HOUSING STRATEGIES IS TO PLACE A TRAVEL TRAILER OR MOBILE HOME ON A VICTIM'S PRIVATE PROPERTY, NEXT TO THEIR

DAMAGED OR DESTROYED HOME, AND THUS SUPPORT THE REBUILDING EFFORT BY ALLOWING THE HOMEOWNER TO REMAIN ON HIS OR HER PROPERTY.

FEMA PURCHASED MANUFACTURED HOUSING OF MANY TYPES BECAUSE THE BROAD IMPACT OF KATRINA HAD AFFECTED FAMILIES OF MANY SIZES AND CIRCUMSTANCES. AS KATRINA HIT, FEMA PLACED ORDERS FOR THOUSANDS OF MANUFACTURED HOUSING UNITS, KNOWING THE HOUSING NEEDS WOULD BE UNPRECEDENTED. ORDERS TO MAXIMIZE THE NUMBER OF TRAVEL TRAILER SUPPLIERS WERE COMPLEMENTED BY ORDERS TO MOBILE HOME SUPPLIERS, THOUGH IN SMALLER NUMBERS – TO BE CERTAIN WE COULD MEET ESTIMATED NEEDS OF THOUSANDS OF HOUSEHOLDS, AND SUPPORT STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT RECOVERY STRATEGIES.

WITH THAT AS A BACKDROP, LET ME EXPLAIN THE FACTORS THAT LED TO OUR EXCESS MOBILE HOME INVENTORY AT HOPE, ARKANSAS. THREE PRINCIPAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTED TO THIS SITUATION.

THE FIRST FACTOR RELATES TO OUR EVOLVING TEMPORARY HOUSING STRATEGY. INITIALLY, THE HOUSING AREA COMMAND ENVISIONED ESTABLISHING MEGA GROUP SITES CONSISTING OF THOUSANDS OF MOBILE HOMES AS A RAPID MEANS OF GETTING DISPLACED EVACUEES BACK INTO THEIR AFFECTED STATE. HOWEVER, THIS STRATEGY, WHILE OPERATIONALLY DEFENSIBLE, WAS SUBSEQUENTLY REJECTED, FOR SEVERAL REASONS. ONE,

THE SITES WERE NOT NECESSARILY GOING TO BE LOCATED IN PROXIMITY TO OR POPULATED BY VICTIMS FROM NEARBY COMMUNITIES, AND, TWO, LARGE GROUP SITES PRESENT SOCIAL MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES, PARTICULARLY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. AS A RESULT, FEMA AND DHS REORIENTED THE TEMPORARY HOUSING STRATEGY TO FOCUS ON SMALLER GROUP SITES, IN OR IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO COMMUNITIES.

THE SECOND FACTOR HAS BEEN THE RELUCTANCE OF COMMUNITIES TO ACCEPT MOBILE HOMES IN GROUP SITES. MOBILE HOMES, WHILE LARGER AND MORE SPACIOUS THAN TRAVEL TRAILERS, ARE REGARDED WITH SOME DEGREE OF TREPIDATION BY COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS, WHO OFTEN VIEW SUCH TEMPORARY UNIT DEVELOPMENTS AS POTENTIALLY PERMANENT FIXTURES. AS A RESULT, THERE HAS BEEN WIDESPREAD RESISTANCE TO ALLOWING SUCH SITES IN MANY AREAS.

THE FINAL FACTOR IS FLOODPLAIN RESTRICTIONS. PLACING MOBILE HOMES IN FLOODPLAINS IS PROHIBITED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER AND FEMA REGULATIONS, UNLESS THOSE UNITS FOLLOW A RIGOROUS EIGHT-STEP MITIGATION PROCESS INVOLVING, AMONG OTHER REQUIREMENTS, ELEVATION ABOVE THE FLOOD LEVEL. THIS PROCESS IS BOTH EXPENSIVE AND TIME-CONSUMING, AND HAS DISCOURAGED THEIR USE IN MANY AREAS. .

WHILE IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IDEAL TO HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THESE LIMITING FACTORS EARLIER IN THE RECOVERY EFFORT AND PROCUREMENT PROCESS, PROMPT ACTION DID PREVENTED SUPPLY SHORTAGES FROM EMERGING LATER IN THE RECOVERY EFFORT. AS A RESULT OF THESE FACTORS, FEMA HAS MORE MOBILE HOMES, HERE IN HOPE, ARKANSAS, THAN IT EXPECTS TO EMPLOY IN THE GULF REGION. WHILE FEMA FULLY EXPECTS TO DRAW DOWN ANOTHER 3,000 MOBILE HOMES FROM HOPE FOR USE IN LOUISIANA, WE WILL STILL HAVE SOME EXCESS BUT WE WILL SEEK TO AVOID WASTE. WHILE ALL OF THE MOBILE HOMES THAT WERE ORDERED IN RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA MAY NOT ULTIMATELY BE USED IN THE GULF REGION, MANY OF THESE UNITS WILL BE USED TO SUPPORT OTHER DISASTER RESPONSE OPERATIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, UNITS FROM HOPE HAVE BEEN DEPLOYED TO TEXAS TO PROVIDE TEMPORARY HOUSING TO VICTIMS OF THE STATE'S TERRIBLE WILDFIRES, AND OTHER UNITS WILL BE USED TO SUPPORT THE VICTIMS OF RECENT TORNADOES IN ARKANSAS AND NEARBY STATES.

ADDITIONALLY, WE WILL BE REDEPLOYING A PORTION OF THIS INVENTORY TO STAGING AREAS IN THE NORTHERN TIER OF OUR NATION, WHERE THEIR STABILITY AND INCREASED PROTECTION FROM THE COLD MAKE THEM A PREFERABLE HOUSING ALTERNATIVE OVER TRAVEL TRAILERS. ADDITIONAL UNITS ARE PROGRAMMED TO BE MOVED FARTHER WEST, TO SUPPORT POTENTIAL DISASTERS IN THE PACIFIC STATES AND OUR WESTERN STATES.

OUR GOAL IS TO RELOCATE A TOTAL OF 3,000 UNITS FROM HOPE TO OTHER STAGING AREAS OVER THE NEXT FOUR MONTHS.

HOWEVER, THE 2006 HURRICANE SEASON IS LESS THAN TWO MONTHS AWAY, AND A PORTION OF THE HOPE INVENTORY WILL PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN OUR READINESS. WHILE WE INTEND TO REDUCE THE INVENTORY THROUGH THE USES I JUST DESCRIBED, WE INTEND TO MAINTAIN, AT THIS TIME, A RESIDUAL INVENTORY OF 5,000 UNITS AT HOPE, TO BE READY FOR IMMEDIATE DEPLOYMENT TO THE GULF REGION IN THE EVENT OF ANOTHER HURRICANE CATASTROPHE. WE WILL RE-EVALUATE THE STATUS OF THIS INVENTORY OVER TIME AS THE GULF COAST REBUILDS ITS SUPPLY OF PERMANENT HOUSING STOCK.

FINALLY, REGARDLESS OF ASSERTIONS TO THE CONTRARY, THE MOBILE HOMES AT OUR HOPE STORAGE FACILITY ARE BEING MAINTAINED IN HABITABLE CONDITION AND ARE READY FOR DEPLOYMENT. WHILE IT HAS BEEN ERRONEOUSLY PORTRAYED OTHERWISE, A TIRE SINKING INTO THE MUD RESULTING FROM A RAINSTORM DOES NOT DAMAGE A MOBILE HOME. SIMILARLY, IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED THAT FEMA IS USING JACKS TO PROP UP DAMAGED UNITS. IN FACT, USING JACKS IS A REQUIRED STORAGE TECHNIQUE FOR 70 AND 80-FOOT MODELS TO ASSURE APPROPRIATE LONGER-TERM STAGING AND PROTECTION OF THE MOBILE HOME. THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 1,500 OF THESE EXTENDED MODELS AT THE HOPE SITE. BOTTOM LINE: DESPITE

MISINFORMATION OTHERWISE, ALL MOBILE HOMES AT HOPE ARE MISSION READY.

ALL OF US AT FEMA AND DHS APPRECIATE THE KEEN INTEREST OF THE COMMITTEE IN ALL PHASES OF OUR DISASTER RESPONSE AND RECOVERY EFFORTS, AND STAND READY TO SUPPORT YOU IN THIS FACT-FINDING MISSION. WE ARE CAREFULLY REVIEWING THE FULL RANGE OF REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON OUR DISASTER HOUSING EFFORTS. FEMA IS PURSUING A NUMBER OF INITIATIVES THAT WILL INCORPORATE APPROPRIATE “LESSONS LEARNED” INTO OUR PLANNING, GUIDANCE AND STRATEGY FOR ONGOING RECOVERY AND OUR RESPONSE TO FUTURE EVENTS.

THANK YOU. I AND MY COLLEAGUES WILL BE PLEASED TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE.